



# Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2009  
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CRM  
(202) 514-2008  
TDD (202) 514-1888

## **PHILADELPHIA MAN CONVICTED OF ADVERTISING, TRANSPORTING, RECEIVING AND POSSESSING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY**

WASHINGTON – Robert P. Merz, 45, was convicted by a federal jury in Philadelphia today of advertising, transporting, receiving and possessing child pornography, Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Lanny A. Breuer and U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania Laurie Magid announced.

Merz, of Philadelphia, had been charged in a third superseding indictment on Oct. 23, 2008. During the three-day trial before U.S. District Judge Juan R. Sanchez, the government presented evidence that Merz's home was searched in February 2007, and computers, DVDs and CDs were seized. Upon review of the seized materials, investigators discovered hundreds of thousands of images and videos depicting the sexual abuse of minors as young as toddlers. Some of the images depicted violent sexual acts being committed against the victims.

In addition, evidence introduced at trial revealed that Merz used numerous online technologies to receive and transport the images.

Finally, investigators testified at trial that Merz created and administered an online group that was dedicated to trading images and videos depicting the sexual abuse of minors. The online group had members from around the world who were handpicked by Merz. The group could only be accessed via a password and was established not only to trade images and videos of minors, but also so members could talk about their common sexual interest in children.

"Mr. Merz, simply by using the Internet, collected and distributed hundreds of thousands of images and videos of some of the most horrific and unimaginable criminal acts committed against children," said Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Lanny A. Breuer. "These images aren't just abstract representations. They are depictions of real crimes committed against those who are most deserving of our protection."

The identification of this online group resulted from Operation "Joint Hammer," the U.S. component of "Operation Koala," an ongoing global operation targeting

transnational rings of child pornographers that was initiated by Europol and Eurojust, and involved 28 countries.

Testimony at Merz's trial revealed that this conviction was not his first related to child exploitation. Pennsylvania law enforcement established that Merz had two prior convictions for the molestation of two young girls on separate occasions.

Sentencing has been set for July 13, 2009. At sentencing, Merz will face a mandatory minimum of 35 years and up to life in prison as well as the possibility of a lifetime period of supervised release if he does not receive a life sentence. He will also face a fine up to \$250,000.

The case was investigated by the FBI and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Roberta Benjamin and Kevin Brenner of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and Trial Attorney Steve Grocki of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. Computer forensics in the case were performed by CEOS' High Technology Investigative Unit.

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